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FIRST YEAR COURSE IN COLLEGE SPANISH

Report of the Committee of the Central Division of the Modern Language Association of America. Unanimously adopted by the Central Division of the Modern Language Association of America, held at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, December 28, 1917, and recommended for printing in HISPANIA:

Your committee, appointed at the last annual meeting of the Central Division to draw up a standard first year course in college Spanish, expected to have the advantage of working on reports from experiments tried in three different states (Illinois, Kansas, and Minnesota) upon the syllabi prepared by the College Entrance Board and the Association of Romanic Language Teachers of California. For reasons that have to do with the situation in which the nation now finds itself these experiments have not been carried out. The committee has, therefore, been obliged to draw up its report on an entirely different basis.

Fortunately, two other syllabi have come to hand and a careful comparison of all four has given some interesting results, among others a remarkable approximation to identity as will be seen from a brief statement of the reading requirements for the first half year: college entrance board = 100 pages; New York Minima = 65 pages (with most classes reported as actually covering 100 pages); National Education Association Minima as proposed by Professor Hatheway = 100 pages; Association of Romanic Language Teachers of California = 75-125 pages.

In working up any syllabus the prime essential is naturally a statement of the aim that is to be had in mind in carrying out the program. Mr. Wilkins of New York recently made the following statement:

“The aim in the teaching of Spanish is to effect that thorough mental discipline imparted by a study of grammar, idiom and syntax and so to develop that ready and accurate facility of ear, tongue and eye that, all combined, will make the present and future use of the language, and progress therein, both possible and certain. We cannot in two, three, or even four years assure a student a complete

mastery of the language. But we can and should so train him that he may apply his knowledge of Spanish to any one or to several ends with the self confidence (conscious or unconscious) that he can easily grow up to any demands that may be made upon his knowledge of the language."

This is good as far as it goes, but there is at least one thing that should be added. In the judgment of your committee the teacher should be able even in a first year course in college to instill into the student some notion of and appreciation for the spirit and culture of the people whose language is being studied.

With such an aim before us, what will constitute a teacher who is well prepared and competent to realize it? An admirable answer is given in the report of the United States Bureau of Education on Modern Language Teaching:

"Aside from the ability to teach, and the general culture necessary for every instructor, the modern language teacher should have a thorough, practical command of the language, a solid knowledge of its literature, both ancient and modern, and an acquaintance, first-hand if possible, with the life of the people whose language he assumes to teach. He should know thoroughly the grammar of the language, and if he has some knowledge of its historical development, it will prove of great benefit to him in his work. He should be able to read the language about as easily as he would read similar matter in his native tongue; he should be able to write a letter or other composition without gross mistakes in grammar or idiom; he should pronounce the language with accuracy, though he may not have the perfect accent of the native, and above all, he should be able to carry on an ordinary conversation with comprehension and without undue hesitancy. This degree of attainment will usually require a period of residence and study abroad unless unusual opportunities have been enjoyed at home; in any case, residence abroad, even for a short time, is greatly to be desired and should be the aim of every serious teacher. In the meantime, defects of equipment can be remedied in part by the reading of foreign books and periodicals, by attendance at American

summer schools, and by association with foreigners in this country."

In these days when methodology has assumed such a prominent place in the educational world that some Teachers' Colleges have actually found themselves obliged to insist that students who take a course in methods of teaching this, that or the other subject should also be obliged to take a content-course on that same subject, it will naturally be expected that your committee will have something to say on the subject of method. Many would have us believe that the grammar method is hopelessly out of date; the natural method so called (than which there never was anything more unnatural) has had its ardent adherents and still has them; and at the present moment the reform method or the direct method seems to be gaining the upper hand. Your committee cannot help feeling that the method that will ultimately be adopted by most of our best teachers will contain the best element in each of these systems and will reject all the rest. We believe, too, that in brief space the ideal method has nowhere been better expressed than in the instructions issued to modern language teachers by the Minister of Public Instruction in Austria, to wit:

"The teacher of modern languages should bear in mind that he must use the language which is the subject of study as much as is possible, and the language of his pupils as much as is necessary; but he should never forget that he must at all times be intelligible to all the pupils."

Even though the teacher speak Spanish fluently he must bear in mind that his primary object is to teach pupils rather than subjects. Therefore, as the aforesaid Minister has said, he must at all times be intelligible to all the pupils. This will mean that all explanations of intricate points of grammar will be made in English. No one would think of teaching any other science (mathematics, chemistry or history, for example) in a language unknown to the pupils. Why then attempt to teach him anything but the simplest facts of Spanish grammar in a language he does not understand? Every teacher among us knows from bitter experience how difficult it is to get the pupils to understand the intricacies of grammar even when they are painstakingly and lucidly explained to him in his own language. Furthermore, we should bear in mind

that the leading exponents of the direct method (the late Dr. Max Walter of the Frankfort Musterschule and Dr. W. H. D. Rouse of the Perse School in Cambridge, England) use the vernacular freely in associating clear and correct concepts with the new word they may be teaching. Conversational ability in Spanish is much to be desired and even in first year work as much of this should be accomplished as is possible, but here again we should bear in mind the experience of such men as those just mentioned. Dr. Rouse in his catalog explaining the method used in his school remarks:

“At this stage [the Advanced, after five or six years of French] the pupils are already sufficiently advanced to be taught by a Frenchman in French.”

This doctrine applied to our work in Spanish will prevent us attempting too much in our first year course; and just at this point your committee feels moved to suggest that even if at the end of a second year we fail to attain speaking ability, our work is well worth while, since all our other objects can be attained if our pupils acquire an easy and accurate reading ability, for this latter ability makes possible an intimate communion with the great minds of the country whose language is being studied. Most of us are familiar with cases of individuals who have never had the privileges of foreign travel and who speak but indifferently or indeed not at all any foreign language but whose knowledge of the literature, history, art, and general culture of several foreign peoples is a constant joy to all of their friends, as well as to themselves.

For pronunciation we recommend that Castilian be taught. The arguments for and against Castilian have been rehearsed time and again. The best recent summary thereof was published by Professor McKenzie as the result of a questionnaire sent to some of the leading teachers of Spanish in positions scattered all over the country. Your committee's recommendation in favor of Castilian is in line with the practice as well as the theory of the vast majority of those who answered the questionnaire.

Your committee agrees with the conviction of some of our best teachers (as for example the declaration of the Association of Romanic Language Teachers of California, reaffirmed in their second edition) that whatever method be adopted training in the principles of grammar must form the back-bone of the work in all beginning classes.

While learning to read simple prose with a good pronunciation the pupil must also acquire the habit of translating into good idiomatic English any text he may be reading. There is much to be said in favor of the Latin professor who insisted that the proper translation of

“ . . . ponto nox incubat atra”

is *not* “Black night lies over the waters,” but rather “Night lies over the waters, black.”

For the grammar work there are in particular two methods of covering the ground that should be covered in the first year's work. One may adopt a grammar large enough to occupy the entire year in going over the ground once. This method your committee does not favor. The other method is to adopt a grammar which will give a skeleton of the entire field in one semester. The second semester may then be devoted to a review of the grammar thus previously done, with greater stressing of detail.

There are two ways in which this latter plan may be carried out. The first is to take a grammar built on the lines of Edgren's French grammar. In this book the part called Part I gives a skeleton of grammar that may be comfortably worked through in one semester. In this part no mutilated paradigms are taught, but a complete outline of the grammar is presented. Then in Part II, so called, that same field is reworked with added details. The other method would be to take a short grammar presenting just material enough for one semester's work and then using in the second semester some good elementary composition book built systematically to enforce a review of grammar while giving some of the more important details that have formerly been omitted. The student will thus have covered all of the regular and auxiliary verbs, and most of the more commonly used irregular verbs, including all the verbs of motion; the gender and formation of the plural nouns; the agreement, formation of plural and position of adjectives; the entire paradigm of personal pronouns; the possessive pronouns (stressing adjectival and pronominal uses); the demonstrative pronouns (stressing adjectival and pronominal uses); relative pronouns; adverbs; negatives, and numerals.

Your committee especially recommends that in both verbs and pronouns the second person intimate forms both singular and plural be taught systematically in their proper places. Even though

the teacher do not care to drill the pupils on these forms in the composition work, they should become part of the student's mental picture of the paradigms in question since he will so frequently meet them in almost any reading that he undertakes.

The study of syntax, as distinct from morphology, should be left for the second year's work.

For reading we recommend the accomplishment of about three hundred pages to be divided as follows:

First semester, 100 pages; second semester, 200 pages.

For the first semester it would probably be best to use some properly graded elementary reader. For the second semester a similarly graded advanced reader or even another elementary reader of different content may be used, although some teachers will doubtless prefer to attempt the reading of individual texts. In any case one such text should be assigned for outside reading and report in the second semester. The story thus chosen should be of about the bulk of *El Pájaro verde*.

In and through all this work in grammar and reading there should be constant practice in written and oral reproduction. Hence the readers and composition books chosen should be preferably those built along the lines that will most easily aid the teacher in his efforts in this direction. In this connection, too, the teacher should give the pupil constant practice in reproduction in writing from dictation.

Last but not least, your committee recommends that the pupils be taught to memorize some really good pieces of prose or verse; pieces that will be really worth the pupil's while as a permanent acquisition in his memory. For this work we recommend about sixty lines for the first semester and one hundred lines for the second semester.

In presenting this syllabus, the committee wishes to call attention to the fact that this course parallels, with due differences in method of attack, the first two years of high school Spanish as now represented pretty generally throughout the country. The pupils prepared under either system should be able to enter a standard second year course in college Spanish. The committee must call your attention to still another point. This syllabus is prepared to suit the needs of the college student who has had little or no other foreign language work previously. Our syllabus would have been

very different if it had been made for the type of student who had had four years of one language and three years of a second language before taking up Spanish, as used to be the case with students who began French or German in freshman year in college.

This type of student is not very much in evidence these days, but when he is met he should not be given this syllabus, nor herded with the pupils for whom this syllabus was prepared. Such promiscuous herding is the height of pedagogical nonsense and is the fundamental cause for most of the evils from which modern language study now suffers.

Respectfully submitted,

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